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*A Thousand Splendid Suns*

By Khaled Hosseini

**Summary:** Section two covers the remainder of Laila’s story, as well as Mariam and Laila’s intertwined story. As Soviet control of Afghanistan continues, word reaches the house of Ahmad and Noor’s death. Mammy is overtaken with grief and remains in bed for the next few months. When Babi brings home news of peace between the Soviets and Afghans, Mammy finally breaks her spell and throws a huge party for the entire neighborhood. The peace is short lived and war breaks out again; Laila’s personal life is simultaneously rocked. Within a week her childhood crush, Tariq, informs her that his family is escaping the violence by moving to Pakistan. Additionally, Laila’s best friend, Giti, dies when a rocket strikes her home. Though Mammy is initially adamant that the family remain in Kabul, in light of the increased danger she agrees to move in with relatives in Pakistan. On the eve of moving day a rocket strikes the family’s house and immediately kills Babi and Mammy, and severely injures Laila. Rasheed and Mariam agree to rehabilitate Laila; when she becomes healthy once again, Rasheed asks for her hand in marriage. Seeing marriage as her only chance for survival, she agrees. One day a strange man arrives at the house, bringing information about Tariq. He informs the family that Tariq was involved in a deadly accident and has passed away. Laila is shattered; these feelings are compounded when Laila realizes she is pregnant with Tariq’s baby.

Mariam begins to feel like Laila is stealing Rasheed’s attention away from her and becomes hostile towards Laila. When Laila’s daughter, Aziza, is born, the pair bridge their differences and form an alliance of sorts founded on their shared hatred of Rasheed. The women thrive, eventually saving enough money to run away from home and seek a better life in Pakistan. They reach the bus station, but are apprehended by the police and returned to Rasheed. In a rage, Rasheed physically abuses both women and locks them in separate rooms to starve. As the section concludes, Rasheed finally releases the women from their rooms.

**Analysis:** I consistently find it difficult to relate to the characters and events in *A Thousand Splendid Suns.* The entire story has taken place in a region across the world from America, in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The characters live in constant fear of being bombed by the Soviets; thankfully, I have enough trust in our government to believe that they will be able to thwart any attacks on her citizens. Additionally, the society in which Laila and Mariam live is male dominated; though there are still minor differences in the rights and privileges of men and women in America, the social hierarchy in this country is greatly different than that of Afghanistan.

These differences in culture don’t diminish my ability to enjoy the story; in fact, having a base knowledge of world cultures is essential to be a contributing member of the global community. Clothing is one element of culture that provides the starkest contrast. Women are required to wear burquas. Additionally, most women are uneducated and instead do all of the household cooking and cleaning. Women are also not permitted to travel without a male companion; Mariam and Laila are arrested at the bus station for attempting to tag along with a stranger onto a Pakistan-bound bus. Lastly, domestic violence in Afghanistan is not encouraged, but the common sentiment from police is that it is not under their jurisdiction to monitor what goes on in the households.

In this section, I enjoyed how Hosseini intertwined two previously unrelated stories. The author does a decent job foreshadowing this plot twist, but the reader is completely surprised by the manner in which he does it. I have also enjoyed how the story progresses chronologically, with real date and time marks. The dates and times correlate directly with what was actually happening in the country during that time. Though I find it difficult to directly with the characters and events of that time, I have enjoyed learning about another culture. I look forward to seeing how the author concludes the fictional story, while also staying true to the historical events.

**Application:** *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has proven that the theme of a continuous search for a better life has spanned time and culture. In the story, both Mariam and Laila recognize that Rasheed is not providing them the life they deserve. He does not provide them the freedoms, and does not offer them the resources, that other women have. Hosseini writes, “The years had not been kind to Mariam. But perhaps, she thought, there were kinder years waiting still. A new life, a life in which she would find the blessings… (229).” In an effort to find these blessings and potentially a better life, Laila and Mariam save up enough money to leave the house.

Authors use this theme in literature because they know that most readers can relate to it. Our country was founded by people who were searching for a better life; the American Dream is based on the principle that if you work hard, you too should enjoy a happy and prosperous life. Mariam and Laila dream of a world where they aren’t stuck in the house all day, and don’t have to bend to a man’s will. Man will always be searching for ways to improve his quality of life.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini explores the violent aspect of human nature. The entire novel is framed by constant war, Afghanis fighting Soviets, and Afghanis fighting Afghanis. Humans who are passionate about their beliefs will not let anything stand in their way, even if it is a human life. Hosseini also explores domestic violence; as this section closed Rasheed had physically beaten both Mariam and Laila and locked them in their rooms. His beatings bloodied and bruised the women. Violence is a particularly somber aspect of human nature, but regardless Hosseini portrays it through the actions of his characters.

The author explores human behavior through the evolution of Mariam and Laila’s friendship. When Laila first marries Rasheed, the two are bitter and rude to each other. The women eventually find a shared hatred of Rasheed and become close friends. Each recognizes how they need the other to survive. This aspect of the plot shows man’s need for companionship. Apart, the women are lonely and have no allies in Afghanistan; together they thrive and plot for a better life.

The human ideal of injustice is explored in the text, but this is only by American standards. Rasheed beats his wives and child, a fact that the authorities are also aware of. By Afghani standards and ideals, this is perfectly acceptable. In America, however, Rasheed would be tried in court and either fined or jailed. This is perhaps the reason that the author includes this idea in the plot, to highlight the differences in the human ideals of America and Afghanistan.

Instances of a peoples search for a better life are abundant in history, and this theme is very prevalent in this section of *A Thousand Splendid Suns.* Hosseini explores the violent side of human nature through Rasheed’s interactions with Laila and Mariam. He also explores human behaviors through Mariam and Laila’s evolutionary relationship. Lastly, Hosseini highlights the contrasts in human ideals between American and Afghani society through the lens of domestic violence. Together, these themes paint an accurate picture of life in the Middle East.